UNITED
NATIONS

TD

United Nations Conference
on Trade and Development

Distr.
GENERAL

TD/B/WG.2/8
29 October 1993

Original: ENGLISH

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency
Second Session
Geneva, 15 November 1993
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

PREPARATORY WORK FOR THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON TRADE EFFICIENCY

Progress report on the preparations for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

Introduction

1. The Cartagena Commitment recognized the importance of introducing new techniques in international trade transactions aimed at producing substantial time and money savings. On this basis, UNCTAD VIII defined the broad orientations of UNCTAD's activities in the area of trade efficiency as well as the necessary mechanisms for carrying out such work. Further, paragraph 158 of the Cartagena Commitment indicated that the culmination of these efforts should be an international symposium on trade efficiency to be held in 1994. This event was to reinforce international discussions on the promotion of harmonized national and regional infrastructure for trade and trade efficiency.

2. The terms of reference of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency, adopted by the Trade and Development Board at the second part of its thirty-eighth session, indicated that the Ad Hoc Working Group is entrusted, inter alia with the responsibility of preparing the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency. 1/

1/ The official title of the Symposium is that contained in General Assembly resolution 47/183.

3. The Ad Hoc Working Group adopted its work programme at its first session held in November 1992. Paragraph 3 of the section entitled "Practical organization" stated that all elements of the Ad Hoc Working Group's work programme should converge on the formulation of recommendations for the 1994 Symposium. The timetable attached to the work programme detailed the stages required for the preparation of the Symposium as well as the timing for the substantive discussions of the issues of relevance for the Symposium. The way the timetable was conceived indicated that the substantive preparatory work should be close to completion in advance of the Symposium.

Relevant developments since the first session of the Ad Hoc Working Group

4. The General Assembly, in endorsing the outcome of UNCTAD VIII, made specific reference to a number of issues considered to be of particular importance in the Cartagena Commitment. One of these related to the convening of the Symposium. Thus, in resolution 47/183, entitled "Eighth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development", paragraph 14 endorses the convening in 1994, within existing resources, of a United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, of one week's duration, and requests the Secretary-General of UNCTAD to make all the necessary arrangements for the Symposium, taking into account the preparatory work of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency.

5. The Ad Hoc Working Group discussed during its first session and in the period following that meeting, the issue of the venue for the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency. The decision on this issue was taken by the Trade and Development Board at its 824th (closing) meeting on 26 March 1993. In that decision, the Board welcomed the invitation of the Government of the United States of America and endorsed the holding of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency in Columbus (Ohio), United States.

6. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, in accordance with the request addressed to him by the General Assembly, has taken a number of measures to ensure, at the secretariat level, the conditions for an appropriate preparatory process for the Symposium. Under the Chairmanship of the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, a Steering Committee for the preparation of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency was set up. The Steering Committee is composed of Directors of all UNCTAD Divisions and Programmes having a bearing on the Symposium. The Steering Committee has reviewed so far major issues relating to the preparatory process for the Symposium as well as to the organization of the Symposium itself. The Committee also considered the most appropriate arrangements, internal and external, both logistical and substantive, for the preparation of the Symposium.

Cooperative arrangements with other institutions

7. The UNCTAD secretariat has taken the initiative to mobilize to the greatest extent possible the potential of inter-organization cooperation for the preparation of the United Nations Symposium on Trade Efficiency. A Joint Task Force UNCTAD, ITC and Economic Commission for Europe was set up which met regularly in order to review the trade efficiency-related activities and define how best these activities could converge for the preparation of the

Symposium. A similar arrangement is under way with the International Telecommunications Union and close contacts are maintained with the Customs Cooperation Council. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD held meetings with the Heads of these organizations aimed at strengthening such cooperation. The long-standing cooperation between UNCTAD and the Economic Commission for Europe continued in support of WP.4.

Logistical and substantive preparation for the Symposium

8. The UNCTAD secretariat sent a planning mission to Columbus, Ohio, from 28 to 30 June 1993, whose purpose was to evaluate the facilities available in Columbus in the light of the requirements of the Symposium. The principal finding of the mission was that the facilities are adequate and well suited to the requirements of the Symposium. The Convention Centre is designed and equipped in such a way that it should be possible to organize the Symposium itself and the other planned events in closely interrelated but distinct areas. With regard to hotel accommodation in Columbus, Ohio, there are enough rooms of the appropriate standard to meet the needs of the Symposium; there are several large top-quality hotels in the immediate vicinity of the Convention Centre. Throughout their stay in Columbus, the mission members were struck by the very positive attitude, commitment and competence of their hosts and counterparts. The city has a modern infrastructure and a high logistical capacity.

9. In Columbus, the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency will be the central event. In addition, three parallel non-United Nations events will take place. Their agendas are interrelated with the issues before the Symposium. They are: the Global Executive Trade Summit (involving chief executive officers and senior staff of leading corporations in international trade); the Mayors' Conference (organized by the City of Columbus with the participation particularly of mayors of cities having Trade Points); and the TECHTRADE Show (exhibition of modern technologies, services and strategies for trade efficiency; the participation in the Show will also be open to States represented at the United Nations International Symposium wishing to organize national pavilions).

10. The objectives of the United Nations International Symposium on Trade Efficiency, its possible outcome as well as the best modalities to organize it were examined in recent months. The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency undertook consultations, with the secretariat and with the members of the Bureau of the Ah Hoc Working Group, aimed at defining a broad framework for the organization of the Symposium. Joint meetings of the internal Steering Committee of the secretariat and of the Bureau of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency were organized.

11. It was suggested, inter alia, that the United Nations International Symposium should be organized in two parts: one, of two days duration, at Senior Officials level, followed by a two-and-a-half days meeting at Ministerial level. Five working groups, corresponding to the main sectors (procedures, banking, insurance, transport, information) for which recommendations would be prepared for adoption by the United Nations International Symposium, were envisaged to operate during the Senior Official

segment. The Ministerial segment (which might also benefit from high-level attendance) would be devoted to specific issues to be determined.

12. The relationship between the United Nations International Symposium and the other three parallel events will need to be further defined as the preparations for these events, as well as of the Symposium itself, continue to evolve.

13. The process of reflection on this subject is still continuing. The Chairperson of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Trade Efficiency intends to make specific suggestions relevant to the discussion of this agenda item.

14. The Ad Hoc Working Group may wish to consider the above information as well as the suggestions that would be presented at the meeting itself and make recommendations thereon.